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ABSTRACT

The Kurds are a distinct group of people who have inhabited the Middle East for as long as there have been written records. The Kurds are the second largest ethnic group in Iraq and Turkey and the third largest group in Iran. In 1975 and 1976, Kurdish refugees from Iraq were admitted to the United States after the failure of their attempt to achieve autonomy from the Iraqi government. Just after the Persian Gulf War in 1991, Iraqi Kurds again rebelled against the Saddam Hussein government of Iraq. The persecution they experienced led to the establishment of Operation Provide Comfort and the protective no-fly zone. Thousands of Kurds fled their home land to Turkey and were eventually resettled in the United States. This fact sheet provides background information about the Iraqi Kurds and discusses the ways their culture and history might affect their resettlement in the United States. The Kurds are overwhelmingly Muslim, and many aspects of their daily life are determined by Muslim customs and requirements. Concrete suggestions are offered to help Kurdish refugees adapt to life in the United States. Because of the relative formality of their own society, those who are interested in helping Kurds with acculturation would do well to take a rather formal approach and to work to encourage a positive attitude toward the national government, something Kurds by history and culture may not find congenial. (Contains 21 references, a sampling of web sites and 1 map.) (SLD)

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CAL Refugee Fact Sheet Series No. 13

Iraqi Kurds

THEIR HISTORY AND CULTURE

Barbara Robson

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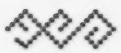

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Barbara Robson

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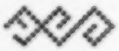
Introduction

The Kurds are a distinct group of people who have inhabited the Middle East for as long as there have been written records. Most live in an area located at the intersection of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Armenia. Ethnically, the Kurds are most closely related in culture and language to the Iranians in Iran; the Tajiks and Pashtuns of Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Pakistan; and the Baluchis in Northern Pakistan. Kurds are the second largest ethnic group in Iraq and Turkey and the third largest group (after the Azeris) in Iran. There are also small populations of Kurds in Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan.



Ethnically, the Kurds are most closely related to the Iranians in Iran.

In 1975-76, about 2,000 Kurdish refugees from Iraq were admitted to the United States after the failure of their 15-year attempt to wrest autonomy from Saddam Hussein's government. Most of these Kurdish refugees settled around San Diego, California; Nashville, Tennessee; and Washington, D.C.

Just after the Gulf War in early 1991, the Iraqi Kurds again rebelled against the government. They were unsuccessful, but the plight of the Kurdish refugees fleeing reprisal became a matter of intense international scrutiny. It resulted in the establishment of the American-led Operation Provide Comfort, through which the Kurds were protected from Iraqi government reprisals against them by, among other measures, the establishment of a no-fly zone over a part of Kurdish homelands in northern Iraq.

Since the establishment of the northern no-fly zone, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), a 20-year-old Iraqi Kurdish political party, had been struggling for power with another older and more traditional Kurdish political party, the 50-year-old Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), and had in various circumstances applied for and received aid from the Iranian government in its struggles. The KDP gradually lost ground to the PUK and finally appealed to the Iraqi government of Saddam Hussein for support.

In the first week of September, 1996, the KDP, with Iraqi troops behind them, quickly took over the major towns and cities in the Kurdish area of Iraq which had been under the control of the PUK. President Clinton responded by extending the no-fly zone in the south and launching two groups of missile strikes to destroy Iraqi SAM sites in southern Iraq.

Fearing a new campaign of repression by Saddam Hussein, thousands of Kurds fled to the Turkish and Iranian borders.

Kurdish workers in Operation Provide Comfort also fled with their families to the Turkish border, fearing retaliation on the part of the Iraqi troops for their participation in an American-sponsored operation. The American government agreed to resettle these Kurds in the United States and began to consider resettlement for Kurds who worked for other relief organizations.

The purpose of this Fact Sheet is to provide background information on the Iraqi Kurds and to discuss the ways in which their culture and history might impact on their resettlement in the United States.

The Land

The Kurdish area includes a good portion of the vast Iraqi oil fields.

The land inhabited by the Iraqi Kurds consists of mountain ranges, hillsides with scattered and scrubby oak forests, and fertile river valleys that can support orchards and vineyards; major rivers that flow through northern Iraq are the Greater Zab, the Lesser Zab, the Diyala, and most importantly the Tigris.

The climate is severe. In the northern parts, temperatures fall to -20°F in the winter and rise above 100°F in the summer. In the lower lands, the climate is milder; there, although temperatures are consistently high, they are more predictable, and transportation is easier along the Tigris River Valley.

The area is supported mostly by winter snowfall in the mountains that runs off every year into the rivers. There is ample precipitation in the Kurdish mountain areas to support extensive agriculture, but the amount of fertile land is too small for northern Iraq to become a major agricultural region.

The Kurdish area includes a good portion of the vast Iraqi oil fields, especially in the province of Mosul, around which international politics have swirled since before World War I. The largest city in northern Iraq is the oil town of Kirkuk, which was about half-and-half Kurdish and Turkmen before the Iraqi government systematically reduced the Kurdish and increased the Arab population in the 1970s. The towns of Arbil* and Sulemaniye are almost entirely Kurdish.

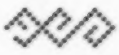
*Also spelled Erbil and Irbil; this is an Arabic word (the Kurdish name for the town is Hawler) and the Arabic alphabet does not completely specify vowels at the beginnings of words. Westerners spell it as they think it sounds.

Its Inhabitants

The People

The total Kurdish population of northern Iraq is estimated at three million. They are the dominant ethnic group living there, although they have shared the area with Arabs, with Assyrian Christians who have lived there for centuries, and with Turkmens who have lived in the area around Kirkuk since they were moved there by the Ottoman Turks.

Kurds are considered a very handsome people. They typically have very black hair, dark brown eyes and olive complexions, but there are many Kurds with light brown or blond hair and blue—sometimes startlingly blue—eyes. They tend to be shorter and slighter than the average American.



The family is all-important in Kurdish society.

Traditional Kurdish clothes for men consist of loose trousers with a shirt and jacket, cummerbund, and a skullcap over which is worn a turban folded from a large square of material. Colors of clothing are frequently symbolic of the tribe, alliance, or political party its wearer belongs to: Yellow is the color of the PUK, green the color of the KDP. Traditional dress for women consists of the loose trousers (somewhat similar to old-fashioned pantaloons), a long loose overdress (sometimes two or three dresses are worn at the same time, for warmth), a vest, and a headscarf covering the hair. Some of the women's dresses and men's shirts have long, pointed sleeve extensions that are tied in the back or wrapped around the arms when working.

These days, many Kurds dress in western fashion, especially the younger generation, although the women avoid the more extreme or revealing fashions.

Social Structure

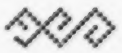
The Family

The family is all-important in Kurdish society. A household typically consists of a husband, a wife, and their children, like American households, but family influence extends far beyond. A girl marries into her husband's family and is very much under the thumb of her mother-in-law, who wields power considerably understated by her public behavior.

To a traditional Kurdish man, his household and family are very private matters, not to be discussed in casual conversation and not a matter for public concern. It is this attitude from which

most of the customs having to do with women devolve: The women in a man's family are part of his household, and his privacy and honor are violated if they are accosted or insulted by other men.

Most Kurdish marriages are still arranged, and it is often assumed that Kurds marry only Kurds. A boy or girl's mother engages in the research and negotiation involved in choosing a mate, and potential candidates are carefully looked over for their character, behavior, and family connections. Sometimes the boy or girl might have a say in the choice of mate, but frequently the chosen mate is a cousin, even a first cousin. This is usually the case with Kurdish men who have gone abroad to study or work; their mothers choose their brides, and they are summoned home to be married.



Kurdish society is traditionally tribal.

Weddings are important social occasions, and are hosted by the groom's family. The final event of a wedding takes place when a party from the groom's family travels with great pomp to the bride's parents' house and carries the bride from there to her new house.

Local Autonomy

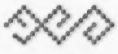
Kurdish society is traditionally tribal. The dictionary definition of a tribe is the social and political unit of a group of people, usually associated with a particular geographical area, which professes genetic relationship through a single (real or mythical) ancestor. Kurdish tribes are united more by geographical area than by relationship to a common ancestor, but in other respects they fit the anthropologists' definition.

Traditionally, a Kurdish tribe or local political group at any given time had an acknowledged leader to whom absolute loyalty was expected (although the leader was often aided in decisions by a council). The leader's position was in some cases hereditary and in other cases elective, and his power was frequently perceived in terms of the wealth at his command. The leader made all decisions and could be counted on to keep foremost in mind the benefit to the tribe members and consequently to his own power as leader.

It is possible that all human societies were originally tribally oriented. Over the centuries and across the world, however, the operative social unit has expanded from the local tribe into ever-wider geographical or economic areas. In most areas, people's loyalty and self-perceptions of identity have correspondingly shifted from the tribe or locality to, ultimately, the nation.

Probably because of the inaccessibility of the area, Kurdish society has remained basically tribal or local, despite the fact that the area has been nominally controlled by larger political entities for centuries. It is also true that, since the 17th century at least, a Kurdish educated elite has existed that has been as susceptible to the concept of nationalism as were the Turks and Arabs and Persians in the 19th century. The conversion of the Kurds to Islam, which had the ultimate effect of uniting the Arabs beyond their tribal affiliations, did not perceptibly weaken the tribal nature of Kurdish society: Kurds are widely considered to hold their local political concerns above their religion—to be Muslims only insofar as the religion does not counter the interests of the tribe.

A traditional Kurd does not think of him- or herself as one of millions of Kurds, but rather as a member of a tribe, a locality, or a political party. Even urban Kurds appear to identify themselves with a local group or party, rather than as members of a larger ethnic or national group.



The Iraqi Kurds are predominantly peasants.

Occupations

The Iraqi Kurds are predominantly peasants, raising wheat and barley for subsistence. In some areas, rice is grown, but the principal cash crop is tobacco. Kurdish farmers raise chickens, and flocks of sheep and goats provide meat and wool.

In earlier times, many Kurds were nomads, moving their flocks from winter pastures to summer pastures unhindered by national borders. With the establishment of national boundaries after World War I, seasonal migration became restricted by the various governments, and the nomad Kurds have since then focused more on crop raising. Today, most Kurds live in villages and towns, and movement of flocks is restricted to the nearby mountains.

When oil was discovered in the Kurdish region of Iraq, many Kurds were drawn to the oil industry and relocated in the towns and cities close to the oil fields. Kurds form the uneducated labor force in many towns and cities in Turkey, Iraq, and Iran, and some have become skilled bricklayers, butchers, cattle dealers, and small traders.

Kurds have traditionally been excellent horsemen, especially in the northern and eastern areas, and have a great deal of knowledge about horse breeding. Naturally, the automobile and truck have replaced the horse in areas that permit road-building, and in remote areas donkeys are more economical

carriers of men and goods than horses. Even so, horsemanship is a valued Kurdish accomplishment.

Many Kurdish men are career soldiers. In Iraq, they serve in the Iraqi army, their loyalty to it depending on whether they were conscripted, and whether their local leaders are allied with the army. A good number of Kurdish men are *peshmergas*, literally "those who face death," that is, soldiers in the service of one or the other of the Kurdish tribes, tribal alliances, or political parties. Traditionally, a *peshmerga* fought in the service of his tribal chief and was supported by the chief in return. In modern times, *peshmergas* constitute the armed force of, and are paid by, one of the political parties.

Kurds have always displayed particular prowess in fighting, especially in what is now called guerrilla warfare. On the plains, Kurds have been at the mercy of armies that are better-equipped than they, but in the mountains they have always been able to hold their own.

Kurds have always been among the more liberal Muslims.

Religion

Kurds are overwhelmingly Muslim and are typically members of the Sunni sect, along with most Turks and a minority of Iraqi Arabs. (The other major sect of Islam is the Shi'a; the Iranians are mostly Shi'a, as are the majority of Iraqi Arabs.)

Kurds have always been among the more liberal Muslims. Kurdish women, for example, have never covered their faces and have never worn the *abbaye* or *chador*, the all-covering garments worn by some Arab and Iranian women. They have worked outside the home: Traditionally, they worked the fields; in modern times, they have attended school and university and held jobs outside the home.

Many aspects of daily Kurdish life, for example their bathing requirements, are determined by essentially Muslim customs and strictures. Some of these are discussed below in the section "Making the Kurds Comfortable."

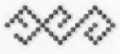
Education and Language

As citizens of Iraq, Kurds have theoretically had access to a relatively good public educational system. However, the remoteness of the areas in which they live has made the provision of such basics as schools, teachers, and supplies very difficult. In such cases, primary schools are the first priority, and there are three-year or six-year primary schools in most areas. Rural families who want their children to have more education,

however, are frequently forced to send the children to live with relatives or friends of the family in areas where there is a middle or high school.

Whether or not a Kurdish child goes to school, and for how long, is very much up to the family. Even if education is compulsory, the law cannot always be enforced in rural areas, and families frequently decide that a child's time—especially a girl's—is more usefully spent at home.

The medium of education in Iraqi schools is Arabic, the national language. In northern Iraq, however, public education has been intermittently available in Kurdish, at least on the primary level, since the formation of Iraq as a country. On a higher level, the Iraqi government at one point authorized the establishment of a School for Kurdish Studies at Baghdad University, and in the early 1970s authorized the establishment of a Kurdish branch of the University of Sulemaniye. Like all privileges to the Kurds, however, these educational concessions are granted to appease Kurds when they pose a political threat and seem to be withdrawn when the Kurds cease posing the threat.



Iraqi Kurds are educated in Arabic and are more comfortable with written Arabic than with written Kurdish.

For the most part, Iraqi Kurds are educated in Arabic and as a consequence are more comfortable with written Arabic than they are with written Kurdish. The same is true by and large of Kurds in the other countries: Educated Kurds are most comfortable reading and writing their national languages. As will be explained below, this has had negative effects on the development and standardization of a single Kurdish alphabet and therefore on the development and use of written Kurdish.

The Kurds in History

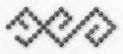
Early History

The first mention of the Kurds in historical records was in cuneiform writings from the Sumerians (3,000 B.C.), who talked of the "land of the Karda." It would appear that from the earliest times the Kurds were generally unaffected by shifts in the empires around them, as they tended their flocks and obeyed their tribal leaders with a minimum of interference from outsiders. This lack of interference was very probably due to the inaccessibility of the area in which they lived, although they early on gained a reputation for being excellent fighters. At one time or another in their early history, some or all of them came under

the dominance of the Sumerians, the Akkadians, the Babylonians, the Assyrians, the Parthians, the Persians, the Romans, and the Armenians.

In the 7th century A.D., the Arabs conquered the area and in time converted everyone in it—including the Kurds—to Islam. The Kurdish area became a border area between the Muslim Caliphate and the Christian Byzantine Empire, and the Caliphate utilized Kurdish troops in securing the frontier area against the Byzantines based in Istanbul.

In the centuries that followed, the Kurds withstood the invasions from Central Asia which brought the Turkic peoples as far west as Asia Minor (now Turkey), again probably because they occupied an area too difficult for outsiders to reach.



The most famous Kurd in history is Saladin.

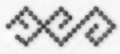
The most famous Kurd in history is Saladin, who in all accounts emerges as the greatest military mind on either side of the Crusades, and the wisest and most famous Muslim ruler. Saladin was born in Tikrit (the same birthplace as Saddam Hussein) in 1137, into a prominent Kurdish family. Saladin grew up in educated circles and distinguished himself militarily in his twenties by playing a significant part in keeping Egypt out of the hands of the First Crusade. Through his own accomplishments and with the help of his powerful family, he was appointed commander of the Syrian troops and vizier of Egypt at the age of 31. He subsequently became the sole ruler of Egypt and soon set out to unite the Muslim territories of Syria, northern Mesopotamia (Iraq), Kurdistan, Palestine, and the rest of Egypt. He proved to be a wise but firm ruler, skilled in diplomacy, free of corruption and cruelty, and dedicated to the spread of Islam. In 1187, he led the reconquest of Jerusalem and occupied it with compassion and courtesy. He died in 1193, and historians agree that he is one of the world's towering figures.

Kurds in the Ottoman Empire

As the Ottoman Empire rose to power in the 13th through 15th centuries, it extended its territory to what is roughly now the border between Iran and Iraq. From then until World War I, the area inhabited by the Kurds was about three-fourths subject to the Ottomans and one-fourth subject to the Persians. Under both, the Kurds enjoyed a considerable amount of autonomy: The Kurdish princes who had allied themselves with the Ottoman Sultan, for example, were set up as vassals of the Ottoman Empire, and the areas under their command became autonomous principalities.

Both empires made extensive use of Kurdish military prowess, and as a consequence Kurd often fought Kurd on behalf of the Ottoman or Persian government. The Kurdish areas in present-day Turkmenistan and Khorasan in northeastern Iran were originally settled as military colonies to protect border areas of the Persian empire.

The Kurdish principalities in both empires cultivated literature and arts to a considerable extent, and a small educated Kurdish elite gradually developed. In the 19th century, the same drive toward national identity that was spreading among the Arabs also influenced the Kurdish elite, but for the most part the several small Kurdish rebellions against the Ottomans were prompted by a sense of injustice on the part of local tribal leaders. These rebellions were promptly suppressed by the Ottoman government, and, as they threatened the weakening empire, led to the imposition of direct Turkish rule on the previously autonomous Kurdish principalities.



The Kurdish vilayet of Mosul was made part of Iraq in 1925.

The Kurds in Modern Iraq

In the days of the Ottoman and Persian empires, the Kurds of the area bordering the two had been an intermittent irritant to both the Ottoman Sultans and the Persian Shahs. After World War I, however, Kurdish antagonism more seriously threatened Iran and the new nations of Turkey and Iraq, as their governments struggled to free themselves of foreign domination and maintain control over their territories.

In the dividing up of the old Ottoman Empire that took place after World War I, the new country of Iraq was formed from the Ottoman *vilayets* of Baghdad, Basra, and also Mosul with its Kurds and its oil fields. The disposition of Mosul was the cause of much skirmishing among the powers involved, but the British who were to administer the new Iraq prevailed, and in 1925 it was finally attached to Iraq. The Kurds had no voice in the discussions.

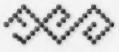
During the years between the formation of Iraq and its independence in 1931, limited steps were taken in the direction of the Kurds. In 1926, the initial Iraqi local-language law provided for the teaching of Kurdish in schools in Kurdish-speaking areas, and for the publication of Kurdish-language books. In addition, there was Kurdish representation in the government.

Throughout this time, there were small rebellions on the part of the Iraqi Kurds among particular tribes in the Barzani area. During World War II one of their leaders, Mustafa

Barzani, emerged as a champion of Kurdish rights and Kurdish nationalism, through his military expertise and through his participation in the establishment of the short-lived Kurdish autonomous republic (the Mahabad Republic, 1946–47) in Iran.

After World War II, the Kurdish elite in Iraq became involved in various political parties that opposed British influence and the Iraqi royal government, and espoused the democratization of Iraq. One of these, the Kurdish Democratic Party founded by Mustafa Barzani, was composed entirely of Kurds. One of the Iraqi parties was the Ba'ath party, which eventually gained control of Iraq.

In 1958, the royal government of Iraq was overthrown, and the new republican government of Abdul Karim Qasim was wholeheartedly supported by all the political parties, including the Kurdish Democratic Party. In the first constitution, the Kurds were named as part of the new state, and their rights were guaranteed. Mustafa Barzani returned as a hero to Iraq from the Soviet Union, where he had been in exile for 11 years. Kurds were allowed to broadcast in Kurdish and to publish books and periodicals, as well. Elementary schools in Kurdish-speaking areas were allowed to use Kurdish as the medium of instruction, and Kurdish departments were established in some of the Iraqi universities.



During World War Two, Mustafa Barzani emerged as a champion of Kurdish rights and Kurdish nationalism.

By 1960, however, concessions to the Kurds had been withdrawn, and for the next 15 years, the Iraqi government carried out an extended campaign of "Arabization" of the Kurdish areas, which included such tactics as armed warfare, destruction of villages and deportation of Kurds, moving of Arabs into Kurdish areas, and other measures designed to weaken and demoralize the Kurds.

The Kurds actively resisted this government campaign. In 1974 (Iraq was by now dominated by Saddam Hussein, although he was still only vice-president), the Kurdish resistance, spearheaded by the Kurdish Democratic Party, asked for and received arms and other help from Iran. The resistance escalated but was crushed in April, 1975, when the Shah abruptly withdrew his support of the Kurds in return for a favorable redrawing of the southern border between Iran and Iraq along the waterway to the Persian Gulf.

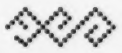
These events in 1975 produced a flow of Kurdish refugees into Iran during the hostilities, and then produced an additional flow when Iran withdrew its support for the Kurds and the Kurdish army gave up the struggle. Some of those refugees eventually found their way to the United States, including

Mustafa Barzani, who came to the United States for medical treatment and died here in 1979.

It was after the collapse of the Kurdish resistance that Jalal Talabani, disagreeing with the decision of the Kurdistan Democratic Party that continuing resistance against the Iraqi government would be futile, formed a splinter party, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).

The end to the Kurdish resistance also brought about a series of government moves designed to render the Kurds less of a threat. Political areas were remapped to designate a smaller area as "Kurdish," and Arabs were moved into the excluded Kurdish areas to dilute the Kurdish populations. Any teaching in Kurdish was stopped, and the Kurdish departments and schools in universities were closed.

In 1979, the Shah of Iran was overthrown by the Ayatollah Khomeini, and in 1980 Iraq went to war against Iran. The Iraqi Kurds supported the Iranians, and toward the end of the war the Iraqi government retaliated with an extensive, devastatingly cruel campaign against the Kurds. Between February and August of 1988, hundreds of Kurdish villages in northern Iraq were totally destroyed, and as many as 200,000 Kurds were killed in the process. This was the period during which the Iraqi government used chemical weapons against Kurdish soldiers and civilians alike, causing an international uproar.



In 1988, hundreds of Kurdish villages in northern Iraq were totally destroyed, and as many as 200,000 Kurds were killed in the process.

At about this time, the different Kurdish factions, who were continually fighting one another as they warred against the Iraqi government, made an effort to resolve their differences and present a united Kurdish Front to the Iraqis and to the world. The participating factions included Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (now headed by Mustafa Barzani's sons) and Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). The Front negotiated with dissident Shi'a Iraqi Arabs who were also opposed to Saddam Hussein, but in the end the two groups agreed to pursue their goals separately.

The Iran–Iraq war ended in 1989, with Saddam Hussein's armed forces nearly intact. Between then and the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait in 1990, the Kurds ceased guerrilla activity in the Kurdish areas and concentrated on advancing their cause politically from exile in Iran.

The Gulf War and Subsequent Events

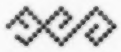
On August 2, 1990, Saddam Hussein occupied Kuwait. Between then and the actual war the following February, the

Kurds at first tried to convince Saddam to trade concessions for the Kurds in return for support in a possible war, and then, as American troops were being built up in Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf, they positioned themselves for a likely Iraqi defeat. They reopened negotiations with the dissident Shi'a Arabs from the south, and in meetings in Damascus and Beirut all the dissidents developed a united front which had the goal of overthrowing Saddam Hussein and setting up a coalition government for Iraq.

Immediately after the ceasefire on March 2, 1991, the dissident Shi'a Arabs in the south rebelled. The Kurds in the north took advantage of the situation and rebelled also. Within three weeks all the Kurdish area was in revolt, the towns of Ranya, Sulemaniye, Arbil, Dahuk, Aqra, and Kirkuk were under Kurdish control, and the province of Mosul was under siege. In response, Saddam Hussein gathered his Republican Guard, marched back into the territory so recently captured by the Kurds, and within a week had retaken all the territory.

As the Republican Guard proceeded, well over a million Kurds fled in unprecedented numbers to the Turkish and Iranian borders. Iran accepted the Kurdish refugees, but Turkey refused them entrance. Refugees on the Turkish border were stranded on mountainsides exposed to the winter weather, and because trucks could not reach them there was a desperate lack of food and materials from which to build shelter. Turkey allowed foreign journalists into the area, and the world watched, aghast, as thousands of Kurds died.

Western governments responded by dispatching supplies through Turkey and by direct airdrops to the refugees. Turkey's President Turgut Ozal proposed that the United Nations take over territory in northern Iraq and establish a safe haven for the Kurds. At a European Community meeting in Luxembourg, Britain's Prime Minister John Major presented a proposal for a UN-protected Kurdish enclave; the plan was endorsed by the other European leaders, and about a week later was endorsed by the United States as well.



As Saddam Hussein's Republican Guard proceeded, well over a million Kurds fled in unprecedented numbers to the Turkish and Iranian borders.

Operation Provide Comfort

Operation Provide Comfort is the name given to the 1991 implementation by the United States and its Gulf War Allies of a safe haven for Kurds. Under the Operation Provide Comfort umbrella, allied western troops on the ground persuaded the Kurds to descend from the mountains into the plains, where

camps were set up with relief supplies as an added inducement. Allied troops were also sent into Dahuk, to maintain a presence so that the Kurdish refugees who had fled that area would go back to their homes. And the area of Iraq above the 36th parallel—which includes Arbil, Mosul, Zakho, and Dahuk—was declared a no-fly zone: Any Iraqi planes flying above the parallel would be subject to reprisal.

By July, the system had been established, and the western troops withdrew from Iraq to bases in Silopi, just across the Turkish border, leaving a small staff, the Military Coordination Center in Zakho, to oversee the continuing relief effort and to act as a stabilizing force. The no-fly zone was regularly patrolled by aircraft from the United States, Great Britain, France, and Turkey.

Operation Provide Comfort was not the only source of help for the Kurds. There were several other relief programs supported by different countries and agencies, and a number of initiatives aimed at strengthening opposition to the Iraqi government and Saddam Hussein.

Operation Provide Comfort is the name given to the 1991 implementation by the United States and its Gulf War Allies of a safe haven for Kurds.

The New Kurdish Asylees

The Kurds employed by Operation Provide Comfort are very probably typical of all the Kurds who worked for western agencies. The OPC Kurds held a variety of positions: clerks, translators, drivers, guards, cooks, and aid workers of different sorts. Those who held clerical positions are educated, sophisticated, "westernized," and able to communicate fairly well in English. Others in the group have had less education and exposure to the West. The guards, for example, speak little English, and are likely to have had about 8 to 12 years of education (many were educated as soldiers in the Iraqi army).

Each employee was allowed to bring close family members, and the accompanying parents, husbands or wives, and children enlarge the first group to about 2,100. These will have a predictable range of education and experience. Service providers can assume that the grandfathers and grandmothers in the group will undoubtedly be more traditional in outlook and will have the most trouble adjusting to a new country and culture. The young to middle-aged adults will be the most anxious, as responsibility falls on their shoulders for their parents and children; it is they who will also be the most demanding of services. The children should assimilate quickly.

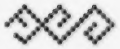
Resettling the Kurds

Cultural Differences

Formality

Americans who have worked extensively with Kurds, together with Kurds who have lived here for a while, have stressed the crucial importance of maintaining a formal relationship with the newly-arrived Kurds. They comment that our American informality, most importantly our use of first names, is interpreted by all but the most sophisticated Kurds as a sign of weakness, of evidence that we should not be taken seriously.

Service providers are urged to forego the standard American informality and friendliness, especially in the first days of resettlement when impressions are being made, and to become more formal in dealings with the Kurds: Use titles and last names all around, dress more formally, and observe strict protocol during interviews, meetings, and other encounters with the Kurds.



Service providers are urged to be very formal in dealings with the Kurds.

At the same time, American informality can be a subject to be explained and taught to the Kurds: Essentially, our apparent informality follows rules which the foreigner has to learn in order to be successful in his or her dealings with Americans. It can be pointed out, for example, that a younger person waits to be invited by an older person to use the elder's first name; that there are situations in which first names are not used, such as with doctors, policemen, teachers, and others in authority.

Political Rivalries

It is likely that the rivalry between the two major Kurdish factions, the KDP and the PUK, has been brought with them from Iraq and is alive and well in the Kurdish communities in the United States. After initial resettlement, the Kurdish asylees will probably regroup themselves into politically comfortable communities. In the meantime, however, American service providers cannot assume that a given group of asylees will fit into any already-established Kurdish community.

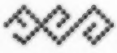
Attitudes Toward Authority

Because of their history, Kurds are wary of laws, regulations, and authority in general, and they will carry these deep-seated attitudes to the United States. Acting in accord with their

tradition, they may attempt to get around regulations that do not appear to be in their immediate best interests. It may also be difficult to convince them that their perceptions as to what is in their best interests may be incorrect. They will also find it extremely difficult to change attitudes about national government that have been instilled in them over centuries of repression.

To counteract this traditional behavior and to educate the Kurds in this most important of American values, service providers are urged to consider the following suggestions:

• *Learn the facts.* Study the legal and organizational aspects of the Kurds' resettlement until you are certain that you thoroughly understand them. It is important that all service providers provide the Kurds with consistent, accurate information about the systems, processes, and regulations affecting them during resettlement.



The Kurds will find it extremely difficult to change attitudes about national government.

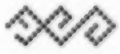
• *Do not make exceptions.* It is in everyone's best interests that this system be "airtight." The granting of exceptions for whatever reason will be seen as weaknesses in the system and provide the Kurds with a pretext for working around the system rather than complying. The granting of exceptions might also be interpreted as examples supporting the notion that rules and laws need not apply to everyone. In this case, consistency is a form of compassion that will serve the Kurds best.

• *Explain the system.* If at all possible, set up sessions to explain the legal and organizational resettlement systems to the Kurds. Include an interpreter, give many examples of the benefits of compliance as well as the consequences of noncompliance, and provide an opportunity for them to ask questions. Kurdish community leaders can help you target problem areas, and their involvement will give them status in the community's eyes while bringing them onto your side. If no leader has emerged, a session with representatives from the Kurdish community might be politically wise. At some point, women service providers might hold a parallel session for the women in the group, or possibly a session focusing on women's issues but including general issues as well.

• *Teach respect for law.* American respect for law and the government should be stressed at every opportunity, with special emphasis on the notion that we obey laws we do not necessarily agree with, even as we seek to change them through community action, in the voting booth, and through contacts with our legislative representatives. All of this can be presented as fact—"This is the way we Americans think and behave"—rather than as value judgments—"This is the way people ought

to think and behave." If all goes well, the Kurds will conclude on their own that it is in their interest, while in America, to do as the Americans do.

English classes might include readings and exercises focused on American law and community action (see the "For Further Reading" section at the end of this Fact Sheet for some suggested texts). It is important to establish that the police and others in authority are public servants that can be approached for help: Kurds are accustomed to the notion that people in authority are to be feared. Community leaders such as the police chief, the fire chief, or school principal can be asked to brief the Kurds at community meetings on their respective services and how to access them; remember to include interpreters, and allow ample time for questions. If the Kurds have no questions of their own, they might be prompted to answer questions themselves, such as, "If your child suddenly became sick, where would you turn for help?" or "Do you know where the fire department gets money to pay the firemen and keep the engines running?"



The position of Kurdish women is still very different from that of women in the United States.

Working With Women

While Kurdish women enjoy freedoms not found in more conservative Muslim societies, the position of women is still very different from that of women in the United States. A traditional Kurdish wife might not wear a veil, but she is still considered (and very probably considers herself) as part of her husband's household, to be used as he sees fit.

The advancement of women in a community is a cause handled best by other women within the community: If some of the younger, more westernized Kurdish women are interested, they can be informed about women's issues in the United States and gently encouraged to use their own judgment in passing on this information to their relatives and friends. If American service providers themselves urge Kurdish women to assert themselves, the men in the community are likely to take it as an insult to their honor, and their support and cooperation in resettlement efforts will be lost. A better approach might be to involve men in all activities, or to cast women-oriented programs as family programs.

Muslim women react differently to American women and their behavior. Some Muslim women take the freedom of American women as an indication that they have no men who love them enough to take care of them. Other Muslim women might be impressed by the apparently free behavior, and try to copy it

without understanding that it is part of a much larger cultural system based on non-Muslim assumptions about the positions of men and women in our society.

Muslim tradition has it that men and women cannot control their impulses and therefore should not be placed in situations where their impulses can get them into trouble. Although this view is not entirely foreign to us, in modern America girls and boys alike are taught that they are responsible for their own behavior and are urged to abide by moral principle, whether or not anyone is watching them.

Much of Muslim perception about western women stems from this difference in basic principle. Kurdish men will tend to misinterpret friendly gestures or sometimes even routine encounters as expressions of sexual interest, under the assumption that women are not in control of their impulses. Since this can lead to unpleasant consequences, women service providers may wish to maintain a barrier of formality between themselves and Kurdish men, and Kurdish men should be taught in turn what constitutes an expression of interest and what does not in this new culture.

In Muslim communities in the United States, terrible conflicts can arise between generations of a family.

Family Conflicts

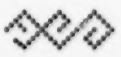
Family is all-important to a Kurd, and an individual will often choose a course of action simply because it benefits the family, or conversely avoid an action solely because it will bring shame on his family. In Muslim communities in the United States, terrible conflicts have arisen between generations of a family: The young people, in behaving like the Americans they have learned to be at school, try to engage in social behavior like dating or socializing in groups that include both boys and girls. But this is unacceptable in traditional Muslim society and therefore highly shameful to the family. Such conflicts are probably unavoidable; the best that Americans can do is (a) to be on the alert for signs of excessive punishment of the young person and (b) to try to explain to the older generation that young Americans are expected to interact socially with the opposite gender and at the same time abide by moral principles. Again, an understanding of our American behavior, and the realization that it is governed by rules, will lessen apprehension and fear.

Forthright Expression of Opinion

Americans familiar with Kurdish communities in the United States, and service providers who have worked with earlier groups of Kurdish refugees, frequently comment that Kurds are

quite forthright in voicing their opinions, whether positive or negative. At times this forthrightness runs up against American standards of behavior toward those who are providing hospitality or service, and is perceived as aggressiveness or even rudeness: It is inappropriate for the recipient of roses, for example, to comment to the giver that American roses don't have much scent and are therefore inferior.

This forthrightness can be exhausting and discouraging to service providers, but there are some positive benefits. It can be useful from a programmatic point of view for recipients to be forthrightly negative about the services provided; the providers are given valuable, if painful, information and can make adjustments that will improve the effectiveness of the program.



Kurds can be quite forthright in voicing their opinions.

Whatever the benefits, it is in the Kurds' best interests, as people residing in the United States, for service providers to explain to them that their forthrightness will be interpreted as rudeness in many circumstances. As a start, it can be explained that in social situations, negative comments about the host's house, food, or hospitality are never acceptable.

It can also be explained or even taught formally that in American non-social environments, there are ways to voice negative opinions, complaints, and objections that get the point across without insulting the Americans involved. Many ESL conversation texts include lessons on these topics (see the "For Further Reading" section at the end of this Fact Sheet for suggestions).

Excessive complaining, on the other hand, might be a psychological response to stress. If a Kurd unleashes a barrage of complaints, it might be useful to assume that there is an underlying problem that needs to be aired, if not solved.

Making the Kurds Comfortable

In the previous section, we dealt with some very serious basic issues of attitude and suggested an approach with the Kurds that is a fairly strict and rigid presentation and enforcement of the resettlement system.

At the same time, it should be remembered that the Kurds are human beings who have left their homelands with a minimum of belongings, and who are faced with a new and complex culture in which they must change their own thinking or be perpetually at odds with their new countrymen. There is much that can be done that does not soften the impact of the all-important civics lessons, but does ease the Kurds' transition

and makes them feel more welcome and at home. In the paragraphs below, we suggest a number of ways in which the Kurds' American friends can make them feel more welcome and at home.

In reading these suggestions, bear in mind that we are talking about traditional Kurds: the grandmothers and grandfathers and rural wives included in the families of those who worked directly with westerners. If you aim your day-to-day considerations only at these older people, the younger ones might become impatient; on the other hand, assuming that all the Kurds are as familiar with our customs as are the ones directly employed by western agencies, you might overlook doing a simple kindness that will make a homesick old woman feel that life in America might be livable after all.

Written Materials

Service providers will naturally want to take advantage of the various materials that have been written to inform refugees about aspects of American life, and it would seem reasonable to think about translating such materials into Kurdish. Remember, however, that the Iraqi Kurds are as comfortable reading Arabic as they are with Kurdish, and that materials prepared for the earlier wave of Iraqi Arab refugees can be used by the Kurds as well.

Materials prepared for the earlier wave of Iraqi Arab refugees can be used by the Kurds as well.

There is also the problem, discussed below in the section on language, that Kurdish Americans who would be the most likely translators of material might use the roman alphabet for Kurdish, which the Iraqi Kurds have great difficulty with.

Names

Many bureaucratic problems can be avoided by paying a little extra attention to your Kurdish friends' names and how they are spelled. Kurds traditionally did not have last names parallel to ours, but over the last century they have adopted them as required by the governments of the countries they have lived in. Most of the educated Iraqi Kurds have adopted the Arabic pattern of taking one's father's name as one's middle name and the tribal name (or a geographical name) as the last name. Other Kurds have simply taken on the geographical or tribal name as a last name, or have adopted as a family name a grandfather's or great-grandfather's first name (somewhat parallel to our many names ending in *-son*).

A problem that is very likely to arise as the Kurds are resettled in this computerized society is that they will be inconsis-

tent about the spelling of their names. This casualness is the result of several factors, the major one being that their names are being transliterated from an alphabet that doesn't represent all the vowels, into our spelling system with its several ways to represent vowels. (Do you spell [said], for example, as *Saeed* or *Said* or *Saheed* or *Sahid* or *Sayeed* or *Sayid*?)

Our naming patterns should be carefully explained, including:

- the fact that American women follow different customs with regard to taking their husband's last name on marriage (Kurdish women do not, and should be warned that many Americans will call them "Mrs. [husband's last name]" or list them by their husbands' names);
- our use of initials for first and middle names;
- our alphabetical listing of people by their last names; and, most importantly,
- the fact that computers will not "recognize" a name that is not spelled exactly the same way every time.

Kurds are likely to be casual about the spelling of their names.

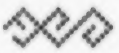
It might also prevent a host of problems to work individually with each Kurd to establish the name he or she wants to use, work out a consistent spelling, and show the different ways the name might appear in lists, for example, *last name, first name* or *last name, first initial, second initial.*

Equipping a Bathroom

One of the very strict Muslim customs with regard to cleanliness is that of washing with water after using the toilet. Most Muslims are very uncomfortable with the notion of toilet paper and with the lack in western bathrooms of a clean water supply directly attached to the toilet. Probably the most humane gesture you can make to a newly-arrived Kurdish family is to provide them with some convenient way to wash while sitting on the toilet. In American bathrooms where sinks can be inconveniently far from the toilet, the Kurdish solution to the problem in places with no running water can be adapted: a vase (unbreakable) with a narrow neck, kept filled with clean water and placed by the toilet. Kurdish women can also be shown that all public rest rooms include sinks and that a plastic squeeze bottle carried in one's purse can be filled at such a sink when necessary.

Food and Drink

The Kurds are not heavy meat eaters, but rely more on vegetables and grains. Like other Muslims, they eat lamb and mutton, and sometimes beef, but mostly in conjunction with rice and vegetables, in pilafs and in dishes parallel to our stews. Staple grains are rice and bulghur (a kind of wheat kernel somewhat akin to Cream of Wheat) and a flat bread baked on the sides of a tandoor or circular oven. Tandoor-style Indian, Pakistani, and Afghan restaurants have cropped up in recent years in bigger cities in the United States, and bread like the Kurds make is often available there. Vegetables include summer squash, cucumbers, tomatoes, and parsley-like greens. Fruit is appreciated, with watermelon (eaten with knife and fork) a favorite. Salt, pepper, cumin, and garlic are common spices; hot peppers are used sparingly, and cooking oil is used with enthusiasm.



Kurds are not heavy meat eaters, but rely on vegetables and grain.

Plain yogurt is another staple, along with cheese. Kurdish families are likely to want to make their own yogurt, a simple process that depends on a live yogurt culture which is added to milk and causes it to ferment. Our whole milk is generally unacceptable for yogurt—it is too rich in fat—but 1% or 2% milk is fine.

Kurds drink tea—lots of it, heavily sweetened, occasionally by means of a sugar cube held under the tongue. In the Middle East, tea is drunk in small glasses (with a small spoon placed in the glass to keep it from breaking when hot tea is poured into it) which can sometimes be found in Middle Eastern grocery stores in the United States.

It will be a great help to your Kurdish friends if you show them where they can buy rice and bulghur in bulk. Middle Eastern grocery stores are likely to carry varieties of both that are familiar to the Kurds. A source for yogurt or the wherewithal to make their own will be appreciated. Finding a substitute for the flat bread should not be a challenge: Afghan flat bread or pita is acceptable.

Greens vary widely between here and the Middle East. Kurdish women might have to try a number of kinds before finding one they like. When the time comes, and if the Kurds can find a source of seeds, you might assist them in planting an herb garden.

Other necessary staples include tomato paste, which is diluted and cooked with vegetables, and whatever cooking oil a particular cook prefers. Olive oil is the standard oil throughout

the Middle East, but many Kurds have not been able to afford it and might have gotten used to using butter or other kinds of oil.

If there is an Arabic, Turkish, Persian, or Afghan restaurant or kabob shop in town, Kurds will undoubtedly find many familiar dishes, and a conversation with the proprietor might yield valuable suggestions as to where desired foodstuffs can be bought locally and cheaply.

Kurds, like other Muslims and like Jews, as a rule do not eat pork. They should be warned that our processed meats might include pork, and taught all the words (*ham, bacon, pork,* etc.) that refer to pork cuts or products. They should also be shown how to look for phrases like "all beef" that indicate hot dogs and the like that do not contain pork.

As Muslims, Kurds will prefer meat that has been butchered according to Islamic law. Such meat is sold at *halal* butcher shops, which are present in any American area with communities of Muslims.

Kurds observe the major Muslim holidays.

Religious Observances

Most Kurds observe the major Muslim holidays. The Islamic calendar differs from ours and is 11 days shorter. As a result, Muslim holidays rotate, occurring 11 days earlier each year. There are two major holidays, both referred to as *'Eid* in Arabic (or [jazhan] in Kurdish): *'Eid-al-Qurban* is the holiday of sacrifice, which centers around the ritual slaughter of a sheep or goat, with the meat then shared among family and community members. *'Eid-al-Fitr* is the holiday at the end of Ramazan.

Ramazan, also spelled and pronounced Ramadan, is the month of fasting. During Ramazan, faithful adult Muslims refrain from eating, drinking, smoking, and other pleasures of the flesh from sunup to sundown. The times are clearly marked each day, and as soon as the sun has set, a large meal is served. This fasting is particularly hard when the weather is hot, and is also particularly hard on people who smoke.

Dates for Ramazan and the holidays are given below for the next few years:

Year	*Ramazan*	*'Eid -al-Fitr*	*'Eid -al-Qurban*
1997	January 9	February 8	April 18
1998	December 29	January 28	April 7
1999	December 18	January 17	March 27

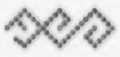
Some Kurds may attempt to continue the Muslim custom of praying five times a day. Muslim prayers involve standing, kneeling, and bowing, and the one praying must face Mecca.

Those who want to pray will appreciate your showing them which direction Mecca is in and giving them local landmarks so that they can tell which way it is no matter where they are.

If there are other Muslims besides the Kurds in your area, it is likely that a mosque (or a church that lends its facilities for Muslim services and gatherings) exists that your Kurdish friends can go to. Ask at a Middle Eastern grocery store for information.

Medical Treatment

Kurds—both men and women—are shy about undressing in front of others. A great deal of embarrassment and family honor can be saved by taking Kurdish women to women doctors, and Kurdish men to men doctors. If this is not possible, the male doctor should be warned that he might find himself examining a woman who refuses to take her clothes off, and with her husband present and answering all questions.



Kurds are personally shy.

Animals

Like other Muslims, most Kurds consider dogs unclean and will be very reluctant to touch one. The Kurds who have had anything to do with raising animals may have had guard dogs for their flocks, but even so will not be used to the notion of dogs in the house. Service providers and others inviting Kurds into their homes should introduce the family pet gradually if at all, and be understanding if the dog is shunned. A Kurdish guest who has touched a dog will want to wash his or her hands, either immediately afterwards or most certainly before eating. Muslims do, however, like cats; Mohammed, the founder of Islam, was once said to have cut off the hem of his robe rather than disturb the cat sleeping on it.

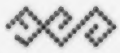
Men and Women in Public

Kurdish men and women, like other Muslims, will not touch or express affection in public, although they will express affection with members of the same sex. Our custom of expressing affection between the sexes will be a considerable shock to traditional Kurds; conversely, we Americans tend to be shocked to see men holding hands and kissing each other. It goes without saying that Kurds will be extremely embarrassed by movies or television programs that include sex scenes.

Entertaining

Probably the best time you can give your Kurdish friends is to take them on a picnic. Picnics are cherished affairs throughout the Middle East and involve elaborate food, drink, and much instrumental music, singing, and dancing. Show them where the picnic spots are in the area, and teach them the local laws with regard to littering, fires, alcohol consumption, and other aspects of outdoor entertainment.

Movies are popular among Kurds, and it would be worthwhile to locate a source for movies in Arabic. Try your videotape rental stores or possibly some of the mailaway video rental places. Middle Eastern movies tend to be adventure stories or the romantic kind with a chaste kiss at the end. A good language-teaching exercise is to show an English-language movie videotape: Summarize the plot beforehand, and stop frequently to ask and answer questions; if time permits, show the movie straight through a second time.



Probably the best time you can give your Kurdish friends is to take them on a picnic.

There are cable TV channels and radio stations that broadcast programs in Kurdish. These of course vary widely from area to area, but you can probably find the necessary details with a few calls to likely cable systems and stations in your area. VOA broadcasts in Kurdish can also be tuned in on shortwave radios.

It is of course part of the resettlement effort that Kurds be entertained in American homes. They should be "walked" through the entire process beforehand, and shown:

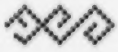
- how we issue invitations;
- who is expected to come (be sure they understand that a social invitation almost always includes the invitee's spouse, but not necessarily the children);
- how to interpret the agreed-on time (five minutes early is not appropriate; five minutes late is all right; twenty minutes late requires an apology; half an hour late requires an explanatory call);
- what to expect in terms of activities and meals; and
- when it is appropriate to go home.

They should be taught the difference between cocktail parties, dinner parties, open houses, and other social entertainment in the community. (This can be a wonderful conversation exercise in English classes: Compare entertaining customs here with customs in northern Iraq.)

One predictable source of misunderstanding is that Middle Easterners, including Kurds, will refuse an offer of food two or three times, however hungry they might be. As our custom is to offer once and take the answer at face value, an American cook may have his or her feelings hurt when the Middle Eastern guests seem to refuse to taste a special dish. American hosts who are aware of this will ask three or four times, getting more insistent each time.

What to serve your Kurdish friends? Except for observing their religious customs about pork, serve whatever you would serve to American friends. The differences between American and Kurdish food can provide a useful source of conversation at dinner parties. An American hostess might also invite one of the Kurdish women to show her how to prepare a pilaf.

If your Kurdish friends express a wish to entertain you, encourage them to do so in a Kurdish way. They will be comfortable, you will learn a great deal, and you might be treated to some wonderful singing and dancing. Do not be surprised, however, if the men socialize with the men, and the women socialize with the women; separate-sex entertaining is the norm in Kurdish society, even among the more educated, westernized Kurds. An appropriate gift, then or at other times, might be flowers.



The most important Kurdish holiday is Newroz on March 20th or 21st each year.

Holidays

While it is instructive and pleasant to include your Kurdish friends in our American holiday observances, particularly Thanksgiving and Christmas, it is their own holidays during which they will feel the most homesick.

The most important Kurdish holiday by far is Newroz, which occurs at the spring solstice on March 20th or 21st each year. If your Kurdish friends do not appear to be planning some kind of celebration, ask them what the American community can do to help them celebrate.

Other important holidays that might be celebrated are the major Muslim holidays mentioned above in the section on religion.

Clothes

Kurds like bright clothes and mix colors much more freely than we do. It might be useful to explain that we Americans are conservative about mixing colors, and that women who wear colors that "clash" will call attention to themselves.

Do not be upset if your Kurdish friends are not appreciative of used clothing.

As mentioned above, traditional Kurdish women wear loose pantaloons and over them a loose dress, and for warmth they frequently wear two, three, or four dresses. In the United States, however, doing so will make them look very strange. Older Kurdish women may need to be told as much and shown how we layer our own clothing, add sweaters indoors, and wear coats outdoors in cold or rainy weather.

If any of your Kurdish women friends sew, they will be delighted to be shown a fabric store where they can choose patterns and colors to their liking. And if any of them weave or embroider, by all means encourage them to do so; handiwork is a wonderful antidote to boredom and loneliness. The products make wonderful gifts, and might even become a source of income.

A Kurd's natural reaction to being stopped by a policeman is to flee.

Security

It is very important that your Kurdish friends learn to react to the police as people to trust or respect, rather than people to fear. A Kurd's natural reaction to being stopped by a policeman is to flee, and such a response in the United States can have disastrous consequences. Take pains to show your Kurdish friends where the police station is, and introduce them to the local police; explain the circumstances under which the police might stop a car; and do everything possible to ease their traditional fears.

Be on the alert, especially among uneducated Kurds, for signs that they are feeling threatened. In such circumstances, they are likely simply to disappear.

A special security issue among the Kurds is that the women are very likely to have brought gold and silver jewelry to the United States. In Kurdish society, wealth is often kept in the form of women's jewelry: Part of a bride's dress, for example, is massive amounts of gold or silver bought for her by her husband and his family. Without prying too much, you might explain what safety deposit boxes are, and that they are the safest possible places to keep valuables.

Language Issues

Kurdish as an Iranian Language

Kurdish is classified by linguists as belonging to the Iranian branch of the Indo-European language family; it is most closely related to the various dialects of Persian, to Pashto spoken in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and to Baluchi spoken in Pakistan.

As a member of the Indo-European language family, Kurdish is not related at all to Turkish, a member of the Ural-Altaic language family, or to Arabic, a member of the Semitic language family. The similarity between Kurdish and the Iranian languages, and its dissimilarity from Arabic and Turkish, can readily be seen in the following chart showing words for the numbers from one to five:*

There are two main dialects of Kurdish.

English	*Kurdish*	*Persian*	*Pashto*	*Arabic*	*Turkish*
one	[yek]	[yak]	[yaw]	[wahad]	*bir*
two	[du]	[du]	[dwa]	[ithneyn]	*iki*
three	[se]	[se]	[dre]	[thalatha]	*üc*
four	[chwar]	[char]	[tsalor]	[arba'a]	*dört*
five	[penj]	[panj]	[pindzə]	[khamsa]	*bes*

The Kurdish Dialects

There are two main dialects of Kurdish and three or four minor dialects. The major dialects are the northern, or Kurmanji, and the southern, or Sorani. These dialects are mutually intelligible: A speaker of one of them can usually understand a speaker of the other, although a Sorani speaker from a remote area might have to listen a little harder at first to a Kurmanji speaker, and vice versa.

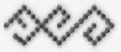
Kurmanji is spoken by the Kurds living in Turkey, Syria, and the countries of the former Soviet Union; it is also spoken by the Iraqi Kurds down to the Greater Zab River and by Kurds in the northern part of Iran. Traditional Kurdish literature is in Kurmanji, for example the *Mam-o-zin*, the 17th-century Kurdish national epic. The Kurdish written in a roman alphabet tends to be Kurmanji; it's the dialect spoken in Turkey, where the Kurds learn to read and write in the modern Turkish alphabet.

*The Turkish numbers are listed in Turkish spelling. The Kurdish, Arabic, Persian, and Pashto numbers are given in phonetic notation, signified by enclosure in brackets.

Sorani Kurdish is spoken by Iraqi Kurds living south of the Greater Zab, and by the Iranian Kurds living in Kordestan Province. Sorani Kurdish is typically written in a modified Arabic alphabet; such modern literature as exists in Kurdish is usually in Sorani, because there has been more opportunity to publish in Iraq than in other countries in recent times.

As is the case with most other minority languages, the modern dialects of Kurdish are heavily influenced by the official languages spoken around them. The Kurdish in Turkey, for example, contains a large number of Turkish words; the Kurdish in Iraq contains an overlay of Arabic vocabulary, and so on.

The Kurdish Alphabets



There is no one standard alphabet or spelling system for Kurdish.

There is no one standard alphabet or spelling system for Kurdish. It is written in an Arabic alphabet by Kurds educated in Iraq or Iran, a roman alphabet by Kurds educated in Turkey, and a Cyrillic alphabet by Kurds educated in countries of the former Soviet Union. The use of different alphabets for Kurdish pretty much ensures that Kurds from Turkey cannot read Kurdish written in Iraq and Iran, although most educated Kurds read European languages and can pick up an ability to read Kurdish in the roman alphabet.

The roman alphabet in which Kurdish is written in Turkey and in exile communities in Europe and the United States is based on the Turkish alphabet, although its vowel symbols are different. Here is a Kurdish proverb, "In a fire, both green and dry wood burn (In a war, both combatants and innocents suffer alike)" in the roman alphabet:

Heke bo ser, terû hişik vê kra disojin.

The Arabic alphabet in which Kurdish is written in Iraq and Iran is commonly used by all the peoples converted to Islam; the Kurdish version contains extra letters to represent Kurdish sounds that don't exist in Arabic. The Arabic-based Kurdish alphabet is written from right to left and does not make a distinction between capital and small letters. The long vowels are represented with symbols; the short vowels are not represented at all. Here is the proverb given above, but written in the Arabic alphabet:

هەکە بو سەر تەر وو هیشیك و کرا دسوژن.

Kurdish Grammar

Kurdish grammatical structure is very different from English. The most basic difference is the word order in a sentence: In Kurdish the usual order is subject–object–verb, in contrast to the English word order of subject–verb–object. This difference and others can be seen by comparing the word-by-word translation of the following sentence with the idiomatic English translation.*

[Beg	digali:	chand	a:gha:lara:n	ku	digali:	Pa:sha:	ru:nishtin	zadi: dakhwan.]
Bey	with	several	gentlemen	that	with	Pasha	they sit	meal is eating

"The Bey is eating the meal with several gentlemen who are sitting with the Pasha."

Kurdish Pronunciation

Kurdish has the following consonants roughly like their English counterparts:

[b] as in *boy*	[h] as in *how*	[t] as in *toy*
[ch] as in *choose*	[j] as in *juice*	[v] as in *voice*
[d] as in *day*	[l] as in *loose*	[y] as in *yes*
[f] as in *fine*	[m] as in *mice*	[z] as in *zoo*
[g] as in *go*	[n] as in *nice*	[zh] as in *pleasure*
[p] as in *put*	[w] as in *want*	

Kurdish also has the following consonants that English doesn't have:

[x]: like German *ach*
[gh]: like [x] only pronounced with the vocal cords vibrating
[r]: like the Spanish or Italian [r]
[q]: a k pronounced very far back in the mouth

The Kurdish vowel system is almost the same as English:

[i] close to the vowel in *bit*
[i:] close to the vowel in *beet*
[e] close to the vowel in *bet*, in some dialects closer to *bat*
[e:] close to the vowel in *bait*
[a] close to the vowel in *box*
[u] close to the vowel in *put*
[u:] close to the vowel in *boot*
[o] close to the vowel in *boat*

*This example, from a 1913 grammar of Kurdish, illustrates the point, and also clearly reflects the Ottoman Empire that the grammar's author was dealing with. A "bey" is an important man.

The vowels [i] and [i:], [e] and [e:], and [u] and [u:] are considered to be short and long pairs, and this is indicated in the spelling systems: in the roman systems, the long vowels are usually spelled with a ^ over them. In the Arabic script, the long vowels are represented by symbols, and the short vowels not represented at all.

Kurdish Literature

The earliest written Kurdish text dates from the 7th century A.D. There is a distinguished Kurdish literature dating from the Ottoman Empire; it is mostly poetry and stories akin to our fairy tales, and much of it contains nationalist themes. The great national Kurdish epic, the *Mam-o-zin*, was composed in 1695 by the Kurdish poet Ahmed Khani. The *Mam-o-Zin* is basically a love story about the boy Mam and the Kurdish princess Zin, but it also includes much about Kurdish life.

Kurdish literature is mostly poetry and stories akin to our fairy tales.

Traditional Kurdish poetry is from the same tradition as *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. Here is a sample in English,* a poem in praise of the girl Laila:

Dalaila Aishana, Dalaila Aishana,
The hills are high and I see thee not;
Oh! That my hand might reach to thy breast,
There is none other on earth like thee.

Dalaila Aishana, Dalaila Aishana,
A lute will I make of fourteen strings,
And the strings shall be made of my ills and griefs;
A comely wife and an ugly man, a handsome man and an ugly wife, come neither to killing nor forsaking.

Dalaila Aishana, Dalaila Aishana,
A lute will I make of serpents' bones,
With strings made from the loved one's locks,
And my mouth shall be for its rings and pendants.

Dalaila Aishana, Dalaila Aishana,
A lute will I make of sparrows' bones,
With strings of a young bride's curls.
Not for me the wife, my love's yet young.

Dalaila Aishana, mine, and of this heart!
They form a new budding flower.
Thy father and mother complain of us.

Laila, thou art mine, Laila, thou art mine!
Nor will I leave thee go till the moment of death,
My plaint has wearied me.

*This translation is also from the 1913 grammar.

There has always been a strong Kurdish tradition of oral literature as well, including folk poetry, proverbs, and stories, many of the latter reminiscent of the revenge plays of Shakespeare.

Teaching the Kurds English

The Kurds will have relatively few problems in learning English: The sounds of Kurdish are not that different from those of English (especially the vowels), so a Kurd's attempts to say the English he or she hears will be quite successful.

The fact that many of the Kurds also speak Arabic also helps them with their learning of English.

The children will learn English the fastest, and the older people will have the most trouble, especially if they have not had much formal education.

The biggest language problem among the Kurds will be in reading the roman alphabet.

The adults will probably do well in ESL (English as a Second Language) classes offered to non-English speakers at local community colleges or adult education centers, although they will probably need extra help with the alphabet and writing. Kurds will enjoy reading about their own history, and—if you can find them—translations of Kurdish literature; these would make excellent texts in reading classes for more advanced ESL students.

The biggest language problem among the Kurds will be in reading the roman alphabet, a special problem in modern America where so much depends on an individual's ability to read. (To be convinced of this, look in the dairy case at the supermarket, and note the number of kinds of cottage cheese available, indistinguishable from one another except for the labels.) Even if someone knows English well, it takes years and years to be able to read quickly and automatically.

Older people might learn more English by being in settings where English is spoken, rather than in formal language instruction. You might try subject-matter classes like cooking or gardening, where most of the instruction is hands-on.

Everyone will need a lot of work in recognizing numbers: Numbers used in Iraq are written in the same direction as ours are (for example, twenty-one is written 21 instead of 12), but most of the symbols are different. The most crucial use for a knowledge of our numbers is in reading American paper money, which is of a uniform size and color and illustrated with presidents and buildings which tend to look alike; for newcomers, the most reliable way to distinguish a ten from a twenty or a fifty is to recognize the numbers.

For Further Reading

We urge you to read further about the Kurds, especially one or the other of the discussions of Kurdish society. The sources listed below are readily available, and will provide additional insight and knowledge.

Sources on Kurdish Society, History, and Politics

Bulloch, John and Harvey Morris

1992 *No Friends But the Mountains: The Tragic History of the Kurds.* New York: Oxford University Press.

This is a very readable account of the events leading up to Operation Provide Comfort (the authors, British journalists, were there in Iraq among the Kurds). It includes a quick history of the Kurds in general.

Chaliand, Gerard

1993 *A People Without a Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan.* Michael Pallis, translator. New York: Olive Branch Press

First edition in French, 1978. This edition contains essays on the Gulf War, Operation Provide Comfort, and other post-1991 events and topics. Many of the articles are written by Kurds and go into a great deal of detail.

Diller, Daniel C. (Ed.)

1994 *The Middle East*, 8th ed. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc.

Excellent collection of facts, maps, charts, and so forth, summarizing events in the Middle East, including the Gulf War and its aftermath.

Schreiber, Jon (collator)

1991 *Walking into the Sun: Stories My Grandfather Told.* Oakland, CA: California Health Publications.

Collection of small stories and anecdotes told by a Kurd and remembered by his grandson. For children.

van Bruinessen, Martin

1992 *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan.* London and New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd.

A very detailed, very thoughtful discussion of Kurdish tribal society, with a wealth of anecdotes, examples and first-hand experiences. Although academic in purpose and tone, the book is beautifully written and therefore easy to read.

Kurdish Studies: An International Journal

Published semi-annually by the Kurdish Library, 345 Park Place, Brooklyn, NY 11238. Call (718) 783-7930 for subscription information. Journal of articles in English on all aspects of Kurdish life, such as a description of edible plants in Kurdistan, an essay on the Kurdish writer's grandmother, a discussion of correspondence between Winston Churchill and Percy Cox on the establishment of the state of Iraq after World War I, and other articles.

National Geographic

Your local library is very likely to have a long-running collection of *National Geographics*, and the articles on the Kurds, with the usual wonderful *National Geographic* photographs, can teach a great deal in an hour or two. The most recent two are the most useful, as they describe modern events. The others provide a splendid sense of history.

1992
August Hitchens, Christopher. Struggle of the Kurds, pp. 34-60.

1975
March Woodson, LeRoy, Jr. We Who Face Death, pp. 364-386.

1958
October Shor, Jean, and Franc Shor. Iraq—Where Oil and Water Mix, pp. 443-489.

1946
March Lamb, Harold. Mountain Tribes of Iran and Iraq, pp. 385-408.

1928
October Chater, Melville. The Kizilbash Clans of Kurdistan, pp. 485-504.

Information on Recent Events Involving the Kurds

The New York Times, Wednesday, September 4, 1996

A group of articles with nice maps, charts, and summaries of the situation that led to the influx of Kurdish refugees to the United States.

World Wide Web sites

Most of the major news sources in the country now have web sites and can be accessed for the most recent news about the Kurds. A sampling of web addresses:

www.nytimes.com

www.washingtonpost.com

www.cnn.com

There are also sites specifically about Kurds. Two that we have found:

Kurds and Kurdistan:
http://neon.mems.cmu.edu/ozturk/kurd.html

Kurdish Information Network (includes link on Kurdish languages):
http://www.xs4all.nl/%7Etank/kurdish/htdocs/

Information on Kurds in America

Izady, Mehrdad

1992 *Kurds: A Concise Handbook*. Washington, DC: Taylor and Francis, 1992. Call (800) 821-8312 for ordering information.

Written by a Kurd for Americans, this is the most knowledgeable source of practical information on the Kurds, with information presented by topic and therefore easily accessible.

Karadaghi, Pary

1996 *A Profile of Kurdish Refugees from Iraq*. Available from Kurdish Human Rights Watch, Inc. Call (703)385-3806 for information.

A six-page background pamphlet for the Kurdish Human Rights Watch's resettlement workshops, providing information on the Kurdish political parties and identifying potential resettlement problems.

A Sampling of Texts for ESL/Newcomer Classes

Beginning- to Intermediate-Level English

Maciel, Timothy and John Duffy

1990 *Here to Stay in the USA*. Hayward, CA: Alemany Press.

General life-skills/ESL (beginning to intermediate level) practice activities, with an emphasis on practical problem-solving and communicating in the U.S.

Knoeller, Christian

1988 *Office Communication*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Regents/Prentice Hall.

An ESL text/workbook focusing on development of communication skills in workplace contexts, including polite ways of contradicting, complaining, and so on, on a high beginning/low intermediate level.

Intermediate-Level English

Byrd, Donald R.H., & John Klosek

1991 *Can We Talk? A Multiskills Approach to Communication*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Regents/Prentice Hall.

An intermediate-level ESL reader/discussion book teaching appropriate communication strategies, centered around American events and activities

National Street Law Institute

1984 *Family Law*. Saint Paul, MN: West Publishing Company.

Exercise workbook on various issues in practical family law, such as marriage licenses, birth certificates, legal aspects of family problems, and so forth. Intermediate-level English.

Short, Deborah, Margaret Seufort-Bosco, & Allene Guss Grognet

1992 *By the People, For the People: U.S. Government and Citizenship*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents.

A presentation of the structure of national and local government and the rights and responsibilities of citizens. English level is intermediate, and the print is large and "user-friendly" to ESL students new to the roman alphabet.

Short, Deborah, Margaret Seufort-Bosco, & Allene Guss Grognet

1991 *Of the People: U.S. History*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents.

The basic events in U.S. history, presented with numerous exercises in reading and conversation, in a companion to the text listed above.

Advanced-Level English

Furlong, Mary S., & McMahon, Edward T.

1982 *Consumer Law*. Publication of the National Street Law Institute. Saint Paul, MN: West Publishing Company.

Story/example/exercise text on issues having to do with practical, day-to-day consumer law, such as contracts, warranties, and so forth. Advanced-level English.

Refugee Fact Sheet Series

The fact sheets are designed for service providers and others assisting newcomers to the United States. The booklets contain a basic introduction to the people, history, and culture of different refugee groups and include topics such as geography, economy, history, social structure and gender roles, language and literacy, education, religion, art and music, food and dress, festivities, names, and features of the language.

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13 The Iraqi Kurds: 1996

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